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ABSTRACT

An innovative administrator preparation program based on guidelines established by national boards and commissions is described in this paper. The California State University, Fresno, administrator education curriculum was reorganized by faculty and an advisory committee of 11 superintendents to meet the needs of local school districts. The program features a district/university partnership, district-nominated candidates and mentors, emphasis on instructional leadership, early field experience, student cohorts, cultural diversity, and district administrator involvement. Faculty and administrators indicate a high level of satisfaction with the performance of program candidates. (13 references) (LMI)

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Innovation in Administrator Preparation

A Paper Presented to
School Services Research
Applied Technology
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Innovation in Administrator Preparation

The impression one gets in reading current journals is that university education administration preparation programs are in disarray and a mess (Glass, 1991; Hallinger and Murphy, 1991). If so, professors and practitioners alike are to blame. Much has been written on the necessity of restructuring preparation programs, the importance of collaboration between faculty and practitioners in accomplishing the task, and the essential characteristics of effective programming (Griffiths, Stout, and Forsyth, 1988). The view taken here is that many of the suggestions provided for improving programs work; institutions are making changes called for in reform documents and are turning the tide in program quality. The time has arrived to discuss the achievements of these changes rather than continuing to belabor what is wrong.

Using guidelines from the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, conditions of quality established by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration, and recommendations by the Danforth Program for the Preparation of School Principals, faculty members at California State University, Fresno (CSUF) and an advisory committee of eleven superintendents have completely reorganized the university curriculum to meet the needs of local districts. The university serves districts located in the culturally diverse San Joaquin Valley in central California, and the superintendents represent about 10% of those in the service area. The program features:

1) district/university partnership: A steering committee of five superintendents and five faculty members have worked diligently for 18 months devising a program which blends theory with practice. The equal representation on the committee is significant because the two groups have an equal voice in changes made.

2) district nominated candidates and mentors: Using a "by invitation only" model for recruiting the very best prospects into the program, superintendents personally nominate every candidate considered. After the superintendent's nomination is received, an invitation is sent inviting the prospective candidate to make application. The program, which is still in an experimental stage, also requires that superintendents identify supervising mentors from among

district practitioners to supervise the candidates while they serve as administrative interns. The mentor should exhibit on the job qualities paralleling those taught in the program.

3) instructional leadership emphasis: The program focuses on instructional leadership (curriculum, instruction, and evaluation) specifically directed to the needs of the culturally diverse classrooms found in central California.

4) early field experience connected to university instruction and professional development seminars: Candidates are granted a minimum of 90 days released time (two-thirds have been released full-time) from their normal teaching responsibilities to complete an administrative field experience (internship). Candidates also enroll in the field experience at the beginning of their program rather than near the end which is typically done so that issues encountered and questions raised can be brought to the university classroom for discussion. Candidates also use 20 of the released time days to participate in staff development seminars taught by outstanding local district trainers or state, national, and international consultants.

5) cohort group of candidates moving through the program together providing support and interdistrict collegiality: Eighteen candidates from the 11 districts are currently moving through the experimental program as the first cycle. Over 20 candidates have been nominated for the second cohort with additional positions being reserved in a third. The program is also being adapted to meet the schedule of year round schools.

6) cultural diversity and leadership in multicultural settings: Candidates enrolled range from teachers desiring to become better versed at site-based leadership to those seeking degrees and preliminary certification in education administration. The first group consists of 50% minority and 75% female candidates; the program actively seeks individuals from traditionally underrepresented groups.

7) district administrators involved in program planning and training: In addition to a superintendents' advisory and steering committees, six subcommittes comprised of university faculty, an advisory committee member, and a steering committee member meet with specialized district personnel to organize course content and the staff development seminars. These seminars

are taught by outstanding trainers, and the time spent is folded into regular university classes as partial credit. These seminars are also open to other personnel from participating districts.

Results

The outcomes have exceeded all expectations. The superintendents selected outstanding candidates and are very pleased with their progress. The faculty is pleased with the performance of students recommended. The candidates in the program are highly motivated and have solidified into a cohesive group. They are already being recruited for leadership positions. And in spite of a rigorous schedule of work and study, all who began remain in the program. The emphasis on the cohort, district nominated candidates and mentors, instructional leadership, cultural diversity, and field-based trainers has served considerably to strengthen the university program. By district administrators seeking an active role in what occurs to candidates recommended and remaining involved in their progress, and a university faculty honestly seeking input and desiring improvement, the university now has a program underway aimed to better serve the needs of schools and youngsters in the geographical area. The revised program follows closely the guidelines established by national boards and commissions and is adaptable to other locations where restructuring is needed or desired.

References

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